

Cheboygan Press Editorial, July 31, 2007

The lack of oil refining capacity in the U.S. is one reason given for the high price we pay for gasoline. But does this mean we should ignore sound environmental controls to increase the supply of gas?

That appears to be the case with the recent approval of a plan by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management and British Petroleum that allows BP to increase the amount of ammonia and other pollutants it discharges into Lake Michigan.

According to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management approved a permit for pollution discharges as part of an expansion of BP's Whiting, Ind., refinery's fuel-producing capacity. The approval is part of a \$3 billion expansion at the refinery that BP says will increase the annual production of gasoline and diesel fuel by 15 percent, or 620 million gallons.

BP would be allowed to increase ammonia discharges by 54 percent and sludge discharges by 35 percent, according to the office of Illinois Congressman Mark Kirk.

Naturally, this increase in toxic waste going into Lake Michigan has raised the ire of every boarder state, except Indiana. Congressional representatives from Michigan, Illinois and Wisconsin championed a resolution urging Indiana to reconsider the approval. It passed the House 387-26 last week.

Mayors of several Wisconsin coastal communities, including Sheboygan, sent a strongly worded letter opposing the discharge permit to the Indiana state agency. These cities are among the dozens that rely on Lake Michigan for safe drinking water. The people who live in these communities also fish and boat on Lake Michigan.

Lake Michigan and the other Great Lakes, already under stress from pollution and non-native

plant and animal life, should not be further compromised by increasing the allowable amount of waste dumped in them.

BP contends that it is spending \$150 million on environmental protection upgrades as part of the refinery expansion.

Given the huge profits oil companies are reaping, shouldn't more of this money be spent on treatment of waste water so that pollution won't be increased?

We think this is the position the Indiana Department of Environmental Protection should have taken.

Instead, the agency says the increase in ammonia discharge it is allowing is within the federal guidelines.

That's a cop out.

At a time when the future of the Great Lakes is in jeopardy from a lack of environmental care and concern — and inaction on long needed cleanup plans — it is most discouraging to see an agency entrusted with protecting this natural resource take such a cavalier attitude.